

United Engineering Company Shipyard,
Wet Basin
(Structure No. 17)
2900 Main Street
Alameda
Alameda County
California

HAER No. CA-295-R

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1-ALAM,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Oakland West, Calif. quadrangle.
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.562600.41842630

Significance: The wet basin is a contributing structure in the United Engineering Company Shipyard historic district that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The United Engineering Company Shipyard, established in 1941 to build and repair ships for the U.S. Navy, is the last surviving of several large World War II shipyards in Alameda. United Engineering built 21 tugboats and repaired hundreds of ships during the war. The facility was one of the largest employers in Alameda and played an important economic and social role in the city. The surviving wet basin, along with two other original wet basins between four finger piers, was the primary location of the ship repair work in the shipyard.

Description: The wet basin is located at the northeast corner of the Alameda Gateway property on the south side of the Oakland Inner Harbor. The wet basin is a rectangular space of water cut into the shore. It is bordered on the west side by the Engineering Building, which extends on posts over the water. On the south side the Wet Basin is lined by a retaining wall composed of wooden posts, concrete rubble, gravel, and the remains of the bulkhead wharf. Pier 5 borders the basin on the east, and on the north side the wet basin is open to the Oakland Inner Harbor. The remnants of Piers 2 and 4 project into the wet basin, and there is a dolphin (a freestanding structure made of posts) between the two piers.

The wet basin was dredged from land that was infilled by the Southern Pacific Railroad earlier in the twentieth century when they owned the property. The current size was created through a series of dredgings in the early 1940s. The initial dredging was undertaken in May 1941. Less than a year later, in January 1942, the wet basin was expanded. The excavation created a basin that cut into the bank 450 feet on the west side, 575 feet on the east side (the shoreline sloped towards the

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west) and was 590 feet across. The basin was 27 feet deep except for the eastern 175 foot portion, which was 30 feet deep.¹

In January 1943, approximately 125 more feet were dredged on the east end of the basin. The new segment had a depth of 27 feet. At this same time, the 150 foot segment west of Pier 4 was dredged to a depth of 50 feet. The final excavation that would give the basin its present shape was undertaken in July 1944. An additional 100 feet with a depth of 51 feet were added to the east end, and approximately 100 feet east of Pier 4 were deepened to 51 feet.²

In the early 1940s, a bulkhead wharf was built over the south end of the basin. Repair buildings and facilities for employees were constructed on the wharf. Eventually the wharf deteriorated and was demolished. Remnants of the bulkhead wharf can be seen at the south end of Pier 4.

Historical Context:

The wet basin at the United Engineering yard was dredged between 1941 and 1944 during a massive construction campaign. The company quickly built numerous buildings and facilities to accommodate shipbuilding and repair necessitated by U.S. involvement in World War II.

The wet basin first appeared on a map of the shipyard dated 22 October 1942. At that time there were four finger piers at the shipyard with three wet basins between them. This same arrangement appeared on every subsequent map of the site and on lists of facilities at the property until 1970. Sometime between 1970 and 1984, Pier No. 1 and Pier No. 3 were removed. This changed the appearance of the area but three separate wet basins were still indicated on a site plan in 1984. By 1988, perhaps because of a lack of maintenance, only the single wet basin between Pier No. 2 and the former site of Pier No. 1 remained.

Sources:

Alameda Gateway. *Existing Site Plan*. 30 January 1984.

Kennedy, Clyde C., Engineering Office of. "Area Plan and Interceptor Profile: Improvements to Sewer System for Properties Occupied by Todd Shipyards Corp., Alameda, Calif." Prepared for Matson - United Properties, Inc. 9 August 1951.

Kintz, Stan. Notes on the Sequence of Wet Basin Dredging, 21 April 98 [photocopy]. Alameda Gateway, Alameda:CA.

1 *Plan No 1: Area to Be Dredged* (Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co., Ltd., Alameda Shipyard, Ship Repair Facilities, 29 December 1941).

2 Stan Kintz, Notes on the Sequence of Wet Basin Dredging (21 April 98 [photocopy]. Alameda Gateway, Alameda:CA).

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Plan No 1: Area to Be Dredged. Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co., Ltd., Alameda Shipyard, Ship Repair Facilities, 29 December 1941.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Alameda, California*, p. 93. New York: 1948.

Thompson, Richard G., Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers. Letter to Cherilyn Widell, State Historic Preservation Officer, requesting Determination of Eligibility. 30 April 1998.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Alameda Shipyard, San Francisco Area*, Sketch No. 48. 10 February 1944.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Alameda Shipyard: Map Showing Existing Facilities and Those Under Construction*. 22 October 1942.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Map of Alameda Shipyard Showing Existing and Proposed Additional Facilities*. Plan no. UEC-A-1-7. 14 June 1943.

United Engineering Company Ltd. Memo to Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks. "Reproduction Costs and Market Value to Third Parties of 'Civil Works'", with Estimated Schedule of "Civil Works" Facilities. 8 February 1946.

United States. Army Corps of Engineers – San Francisco District and California. State Historic Preservation Officer. Memorandum of Agreement Regarding the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project, Alameda County, California. Signed 31 January 2001 and 22 January 2001.

Widell, Cherilyn, State Historic Preservation Officer. Letter to Richard G. Thompson, Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers, Regarding Oakland Harbor Ship Channel Deepening and Improvements, Alameda County [Determination of Eligibility Concurrence]. 9 June 1998.

Project Information:

This report was prepared for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Oakland in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District and the California State Historic Preservation Officer concerning the former United Engineering Company shipyard. The Port of Oakland and the City of Alameda were concurring parties to the MOA. The MOA was created because of a proposal by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in partnership with the Port of Oakland to

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sponsor the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project. This project "would deepen Oakland Harbor channels and berth areas from -42 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) to -50 feet MLLW, with 2 feet overdredge allowance" and widen some portions of the channels. These actions, which would constitute an Undertaking under Section 106, would result in the demolition of several buildings and structures at the former United Engineering Company Shipyard. Because the shipyard had been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the Undertaking would have an adverse effect on the property. Under the MOA, the following HAER documentation has been prepared: a written historic and descriptive report on the shipyard as a whole, seventeen separate reports on individual buildings and structures in the shipyard, including this report, and photographic documentation.

This structure will be demolished by the federal undertaking.

This report was prepared by Jody Stock, architectural designer, and Michael R. Corbett, architectural historian. Corbett was a subcontractor to Basin Research Associates of San Leandro. Basin Research was under contract to g. borchard & associates.